



**Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks**

March 9, 2001

1420 East 6th Ave.  
P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council  
Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Fisheries Division  
Endangered Species Coordinator  
Nongame Coordinator  
Missoula Office  
Montana State Library, Helena  
MT Environmental Information Center  
Montana Audubon Council  
Missoula County Conservation District, 5115 Highway 93 South, Missoula, MT 59801  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
Lynnette Sims, 15350 Springhill Drive, Frenchtown, MT 59834

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for a Future Fisheries Project tentatively planned to replace an existing under-sized, perched culvert on Mill Creek with a larger arch culvert to improve upstream fish passage for rainbow trout and brown trout. Mill Creek is a large perennial tributary to the Clark Fork River that is a key spawning area for rainbow trout and brown trout. This proposed project is located on property maintained by the residents of Springhill Drive approximately 2 miles northeast of the town of Frenchtown in Missoula County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., April 9, 2001 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer  
Habitat Protection Bureau  
Fisheries Division  
e-mail: mlere@state.mt.us

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Mill Creek Culvert Replacement Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 that directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. This project is being proposed to replace an existing, under-sized, perched culvert with a larger arch culvert placed below channel elevation invert to improve upstream fish passage. Mill Creek is a large fourth order tributary of the Clark Fork River that supports rainbow trout, brown trout and brook trout in the lower reaches and a few remnant westslope cutthroat trout in the headwaters. The culvert is located on a private stream crossing that is owned and maintained by residents of Springhill Drive. This stream crossing is located approximately 2 miles northeast of the town of Frenchtown in Missoula County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Mill Creek located approximately 2 miles northeast of the town of Frenchtown within Township 15 North, Range 21 West, Sections 25 and 36 in Missoula County.

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to "restore and enhance degraded habitats" by implementing habitat restoration projects and administering the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on public and private lands. This proposed project would help achieve this goal.

Mill Creek is a large tributary to the Clark Fork River and is a key spawning area for rainbow trout and brown trout. The culvert identified in this proposed project, located approximately 2.5 upstream from the mouth, was the only significant fish migration barrier found during a recent watershed survey conducted by Fish, Wildlife and Parks' personnel. The culvert likely acts as a selective barrier at high flows because of high water velocities and at low flows because of the perched nature of the pipe. Replacing the existing culvert will enhance the passage of migrant spawners and, as a result, likely will lead to enhanced recruitment of trout to the Clark Fork River. The Clark Fork River is considered to be a recruitment limited system.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to replace an 84 inch diameter round culvert that is under-sized and perched with a larger arch pipe (157 inches by 101 inches) that would be buried a minimum of 12 inches beneath the invert elevation of the channel bottom. The new corrugated steel pipe would be 60 feet in length. Large boulders will be placed in a random fashion downstream of the pipe outlet to maintain outlet pool characteristics and reduce velocities. This project is expected to cost \$39,077.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$11,800.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Enhancing fish passage in Mill Creek by replacing an under-sized, perched culvert is expected to increase recruitment of rainbow trout and brown trout to the Clark Fork River. The Clark Fork River is considered a recruitment limited system. As a result, the project is expected to enhance rainbow trout and brown trout populations in both Mill Creek and the Clark Fork River.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota. A 310 permit (Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained from the local conservation district and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted for requirements needed to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit).

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils within the immediate project area would be disturbed during construction, but would be stabilized with re-vegetation efforts (sowing seed).

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed within the immediate project area during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts would act to mitigate these disturbances.

5. Aesthetics

Aesthetics of the site would be degraded during the short time frame of construction. Long term impacts to aesthetics would be negligible.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources.

The headwaters of Mill Creek support westslope cutthroat trout of unknown genetic integrity. Replacing the existing culvert to enhance fish passage, however, will not pose a threat to these native fish. The existing culvert acts as a selective barrier and, as a result, rainbow trout and brown trout are found both downstream and upstream of the stream crossing. Since the culvert does not

act as an isolation barrier, enhancing fish passage at this site will not threaten headwater populations.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project may require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

Mill Creek is a large perennial tributary to the Clark Fork River that is a key spawning area for rainbow trout and brown trout. Enhancing fish passage at this culvert site, located about 2.5 miles upstream from the mouth, would increase recruitment of trout to the Clark Fork River. Since the Clark Fork River is considered a recruitment limited system, enhancing trout reproduction in Mill Creek is expected to improve recreational fishing in the river.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, the culvert on Mill Creek will continue to act as a selective barrier. As such, the passage of migrant spawners from the Clark Fork River will continue to be hindered and the potential for recruitment will remain reduced.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to enhance fish passage at a culvert crossing located on lower Mill Creek. Mill Creek is a large perennial tributary to the Clark Fork River that is a key spawning area for rainbow trout and brown trout. Enhancing fish passage at this culvert site would increase recruitment of trout to the Clark Fork River. Since the Clark Fork River is considered a recruitment limited system, enhancing trout reproduction in Mill Creek is expected to improve recreational fishing in the river.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks web page: [fwp.state.mt.us](http://fwp.state.mt.us).

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on April 9, 2001.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer  
Habitat Protection Bureau  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
1420 East 6th Avenue  
Helena, MT 59620

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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS  
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701  
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Mill Creek Culvert Replacement Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The project is being proposed to replace an existing under-sized, perched, culvert on Mill Creek with a larger arch culvert buried below channel elevation invert. This culvert replacement would improve upstream fish passage for rainbow trout and brown trout migrating from the Clark Fork River. The project site is located on a private stream crossing maintained by the residents of Springhill Drive approximately 2 miles northeast of the town of Frenchtown in Missoula County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

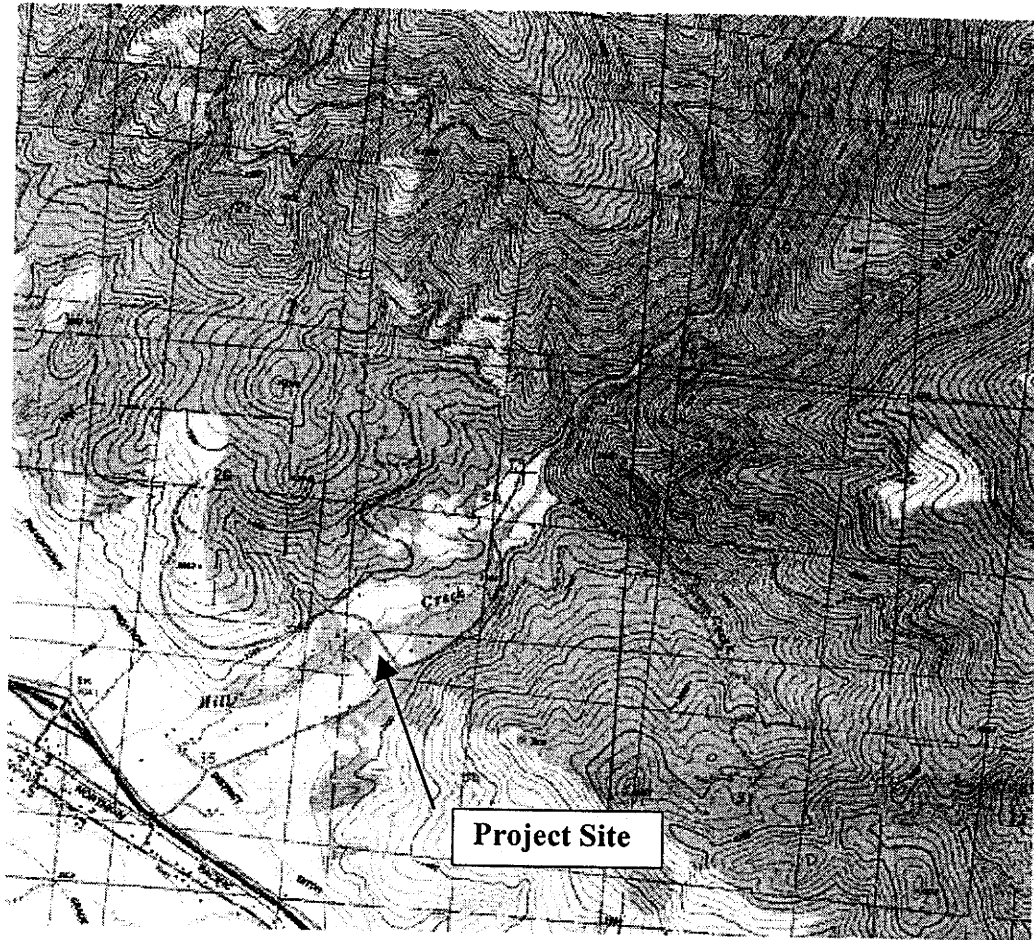
	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Missoula  
County Conservation District, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers,  
Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office  
Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Ladd Knotek, Montana Fish, Wildlife and  
Parks

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: February 16, 2001



**Attachment 1. Map showing location of project site.**